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INFORMATIONAL LETTER #98-14

DATE: December 7, 1998

TO: ADMINISTRATORS
HOSPITALS
NURSING FACILITIES
RESIDENTIAL CARE/ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES

FROM: JOHN W. HATHAWAY, Chief
Bureau of Facility Standards

SUBJECT: **HOLIDAY FIRE HAZARDS**

The holiday season has once again arrived and riding along is the increased potential for fires. In planning your facility's holiday activities, please be on the watch for holiday hazards such as flammable decorations, questionable lights, and increased use of electrical devices (extension cords and adaptors).

In the past couple of weeks, this office has received several inquiries as to whether cut Christmas trees can or cannot be used in Health Care/Limited Care Occupancies. Section 31-1.4.5 of the Life Safety Code, 1994 Edition prohibits explosive or highly flammable furnishings from use and includes ordinary crepe paper decorations and **untreated** Christmas trees as highly flammable decorations in its explanatory material. As further clarification, this office will allow the use of cut trees provided facility policy does not prohibit them, your local fire authority has approved their use, and all of the following are met:

1. They are effectively treated and maintained flame retardant. Most flocking in general is **not** a listed fire retardant treatment material.
2. They are not located in any patient sleeping room or corridor.
3. They are placed and secured in bases of water or food nutrient solution. Note: Prior to placement in the base, cut a portion off the bottom of the tree.

4. Lights should be restricted to an external source such as a color wheel or flood light; however, the use of U.L. listed mini-lights on a tree, although not encouraged, is not prohibited. All lights should be unplugged at night.
5. They are located remote from any/all heat sources, and smoking or open flames of any kind are restricted from the area.
6. They are checked daily by engineering/maintenance for signs of drying and removed if signs are noted (i.e., stiff needles, excessive shedding of needles).

In lieu of a cut tree(s), this office recommends the use of U.L. listed artificial trees which will eliminate the potential hazards associated with cut trees.

As an alternative to both a cut and/or artificial tree, recommend you consider the use of a live tree. Although some of the cautionary measures listed would need to be considered, a live tree is not considered highly flammable and can be transplanted to the outdoors after the holidays and as weather permits.

Please discuss the potential holiday hazards with all employees. The Christmas season is a time for giving — let's give the gift of a fire-safe holiday.

JOHN W. HATHAWAY, Chief
Bureau of Facility Standards

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cc: Idaho Hospital Association
Idaho Health Care Association
Idaho Residential and Assisted Living Association

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